

SIATRAS NUMISMATIC STUDIES, 10

Constantinos M. Constantopoulos

BYZANTINE LEAD SEALS
The Stamoules' Collection



*Edited, translated into English and
published by Demetrius Siatras*

ATHENS 2023

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Anastasios Stamoules was a Greek born in 1843 at the small town of Selymbria, Eastern Thrace, then a part of the Ottoman Empire. He studied in the Orthodox College of the Oecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople, known as the Great School of the Nation.

From very young age, he had started collecting objects relating to the history of Thrace. As a result a huge collection of Greek, Roman and Byzantine objects was formed. Unfortunately the biggest part of this collection was stolen by the troops of the Allies during WW I.*

The forced population displacement of the 1920's lead the whole family in Athens. In 1924 Stamoules donated the coins and the lead seals that managed to bring with him to the Numismatic Museum.

This book presents in detail the Byzantine lead seals of Stamoules' Collection. What is important is that all seals were locally collected, at the small area around Selymbria; one could justifiably call it "the Selymbria Collection". The Byzantine city was an important strategic settlement located in the interior of the Long Walls of Thrace, at the end of Via Egnatia; it also was a religious centre, as is still obvious from the remains of many churches that survive. It is mentioned in the sources as an archdiocese and later as a metropolis. Therefore the seals of the Collection can also be used as a primary material for historical studies.

Athens, March 2023

Demetrius Siatras

(*) Read more about the Stamoules' collection in "Αρχαιότητες και αρχαιολογία στα θρακικά παράλια της Προποντίδας" by L. Polychronides-Loukopoulos. In: Marianna Koromelas (ed.), *Οι Έλληνες στη Μαύρη Θάλασσα από την εποχή του χαλκού ως τις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα*. Athens: Panorama, 2001.

FOREWORD

In 1924 the philogenous and friend of the antiquity Anastasios P.C. Stamoules of Selymbria, Thrace, donated his remarkable collection of Greek, Roman and Byzantine coins, lead seals, weights and the like to the Athens' Numismatic Museum; the collection was studied in the Museum and catalogued.

This is the first publication of objects of this collection; we considered as more purposeful to give priority to the Byzantine lead seals because almost all of them are unpublished and their historical background is equally interesting.

We classified the whole collection of seals in eleven chronological categories according to their style, *i.e.* seals bearing:

A. Latin inscriptions on both sides, 6th - 7th ce.;

B. mixed inscriptions, either Latin or written with Latin characters on the obverse side and Greek on the reverse side, 6th - 7th ce.;

Γ. monograms on both sides, analyzable to the name and office of the owner, 6th - 7th ce.;

Δ. saint depictions as well as monograms dated to the end of the 6th or to the 7th centuries, with the exception of two seals belonging to the 9th century as we concluded from their style;

E. a characteristic type of eagle with wings spread upwards and mostly a star or monogram among them; in some of them one can also notice monograms or inscriptions denoting the name and officium of the owner. Chronologically, these seals also belong to the 6th or 7th centuries;

Ζ. a cruciform monogram analyzable either as

Κύριε or Θεοτόκε βοήθει

[Lord or Mother of God, help]

or as the name of the owner, sometimes also bearing in the four quadrants an inscription denoting his officium. Chronologically, these belong to the 7th or 8th centuries;

Z. a similar monogram with the words

τῶ-σῶ-δού-λω
[= your servant]

in the four quadrants and an inscription with the name and one or more officia of the owner. This is one of the most important categories in Byzantine sigillography and dates back to the 8th or 9th centuries;

H. simple or double (patriarchal) cross usually placed on a three-step base, with spiral ornaments on both sides of it and the inscription:

Κύριε or Θεοτόκε βοήθει

in the circumference; these are accompanied by another inscription with the name and offices of the owner. The seal no. 64 of the *Catalogue* is a variant of this type; it bears in the middle a cruciform monogram with the inscription:

Κύριε βοήθει τῶ σῶ δούλω
[= Lord, help your servant]

Chronologically, these are dated to the 10th and the first half of the 11th centuries; however, the first seals of this category might belong to the end of the 9th century;

Θ. inscriptions on both sides with the names and offices of the owners; it is usually lead seals of the 11th century or rarely of the first half of the 12th century;

I. iconographic types, mostly Virgin Mary in bust or full-body depictions, as well as other saints of which the most common are George, Demetrius, Nicholas and the two Theodores. The lead seals of this category also bear inscriptions with the names of the owners. Depending on their style, these belong to the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, with the exceptions of no. 21 (7th) and no. 22 (9th or 10th ce.). We might consider as belonging to the same category the seals with inscriptions around saint depictions on both sides (nos. 73 and 74 of the *Catalogue*).

IA. iconographic types on both sides, 11th - 12th centuries.

We considered as more helpful this form of seal classification instead of the administrative division of the empire in themata because the total number of the seals is relatively small and, even more, because the geographical system of classification is scientifically incomplete. Despite the efforts, until today there is no absolutely safe system of a chronological classification based only on the style of the inscriptions and types; besides we also have to face the most important issue of the existence or absence of titles and offices of the civil and military hierarchy; these were abolished and replaced by others from time to time and the only way of solving it is the precise chronological classification of the seals.

The collection includes lead seals that mostly belonged to civil or military officials; only a few are ecclesiastical seals. The offices might be real or honourific; usually the same person possessed one real office and one honourific title. The most common honourific titles were:

(πρωτο)σπαθάριος	(prōto)spatharios
σπαθαροκανδιδάτος	spatharocandidatos
πατρικίος	patricios (probably a title of nobility)
(πρωτο)πρόεδρος	(prōto)proedros

Also, later, in the years of the Comnenes and the Palaeologans:

σεβαστὸς	sebastos
πρωτοσέβαστος	prōtosebastos
πανσέβαστος	pansebastos, etc.

The seal owners of the earlier years usually hold a real office in addition to the honourific *ἀπὸ ὑπάτων* and *ἀπὸ ἐπαρχῶν*. As the time passes, new offices appear and new combinations of real offices with honourific titles; so in the 11th and 12th centuries a person might possess three or four of them.

In the Stamoules' collection the following combinations of real offices with honourific titles appear:

πρόεδρος - λογοθέτης τοῦ δρόμου
πρόεδρος - κατεπάνω Ἀδριανουπόλεως
πρωτοπρόεδρος - κατεπάνω Μακεδονίας
πρωτοσπαθάριος - στρατηγός Πελοποννήσου

πρωτοσπαθάριος - κριτής ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἱπποδρόμου καὶ
 τῶν Ἀρμενικῶν
 πρωτοσπαθάριος - ἐπὶ τοῦ χρυσοτρικλίνου
 πρωτοσπαθάριος - ἐπὶ τοῦ μαγκλαβίου
 πρωτοσπαθάριος - τοῦ πλοῖμου
 πρωτοσπαθάριος - ἄρχων Ἀθηνῶν
 σπαθαροκανδιδᾶτος - χαρτουλάριος τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ
 σπαθαροκανδιδᾶτος - βασιλικὸς νοτάριος τῆς σακέλλης
 πατρίκιος - στρατηγὸς Κρήτης
 πατρίκιος, ανθύπατος - κριτής τοῦ βήλου καὶ γηροτρόφος
 ὀστιάριος - πρωτονοτάριος Παφλαγονίας
 βεστάρχης - στρατηγὸς Σερβίων

There is also the case of a person that holds two real offices:

πρωτομανδάτωρ - ἐκ προσώπου τῆς Θράκης
 στράτωρ - πρωτοστράτωρ τοῦ κοντοσταύλου,

while in other seals there is only the real office:

praefectus insularis
 ὕπατος
 στρατηλάτης
 κανδιδᾶτος
 κουβικουλάριος
 νοτάριος
 τοποτηρητής
 ἄρχων τῆς Θεμέλης
 ἐπισκεπτής Ἀρμενικοῦ

or only the honourific title:

ἀπὸ ἐπάρχων
 ἀπὸ ὑπάτων
 πρωτοσπαθάριος
 σπαθαροκουβικουλάριος
 πρόεδρος
 πατρίκιος (probably as a title of nobility)

Keep in mind that from the 10th century one could buy off a title void of any real function.

The question of the Byzantine titles and offices remains unanswered because the written sources are inadequate and unclear.

Only the lead seals could lead us to safe conclusions about the multitude of titles and offices in use during the various periods of the Byzantine history, since many of these offices were early abolished while others were introduced later and again were replaced by newer ones. That's why the notorious historian of the Greek nation Constantinos Paparrhegopoulos, who was aware only of the written sources and especially of *Codinus*, was right concluding that

*"a complete treatise on the totality of the offices of the Byzantine state during his millenary history would be a Herculean task which could not be considered as a simple part of its other history".**

But if the lead seals could be systematically dated, which only in part has been done until today, we would be able to determine more precisely the times during which the various honourific titles and the real offices were in use; towards this direction we tried to date the Stamoules' lead seals following the evolution of their style and their inscriptions.

As far as it concerns the occurring in the present collection iconographic types we remark that — as always happens with lead seals — the most common and diverse are the types of Theotocos (Virgin Mary) who is depicted either in full-body or in bust. Theotocos is depicted:

In full-body:

a. standing and holding in Her right arm the divine Infant; or with the Infant in a circle in front of her chest; or praying (also with the Infant in a circle or without the Infant);

b. sitting on a throne with the Infant on Her knees; or otherwise depicted with the Saints Theodore and Demetrius or George around Her and praying to Her.

In bust:

a. praying with the Infant in a circle in front of Her chest; or praying without the Infant.

b. with the Infant depicted in a circle in front of Her chest;

c. holding the Infant in Her left arm.

Other commonly occurring iconographic types, standing or in bust, are those of the Archangel Michael and Theodor-

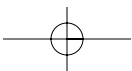
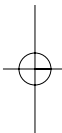
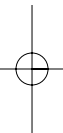
Stratēlatēs and (only once each) Theodore of Amasea, Saint Demetrius and Saint George. On one seal we see Thomas the Apostle and Saint Nicholas standing in parallel. Only in bust are depicted Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Nicholas, Saint Gregory, and Saint Basil of Amasea (the latter as far as we know for the first time on a Byzantine lead seal). There are also two rarely occurring on Byzantine lead seals types, *i.e.* Daniel among two lions and an Evangelist seating and writing a Gospel. Finally, we have a technically very interesting depiction of the Annunciation.

The depictions on the Byzantine lead seals are also used in the study of the Byzantine iconography. It is easier to date the continuous evolution of the iconographic types on the seals than on other iconographic monuments.

We tried for short and clear descriptions of the lead seals. Each inscription is given in capital letters in which the dots denote the missing letters; then follows a transcription in small letters in which we have restored the illegible characters in rectangular brackets, the abbreviations in curved brackets, and the omitted by the engraver letters in parentheses. This is the most suitable method for the publication of seal inscriptions; it permits the precise attribution of word abbreviations and the filling of the gaps. We followed the same method for the publication of the big collection of lead seals of the Athens' Numismatic Museum. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, this method is not generally followed. Even the unforgettable G. Schlumberger did not use it in his great work *"Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin"*, of which a major disadvantage is the method of publication of the seal inscriptions; neither the gaps nor the abbreviations are correctly attributed. The result is misreadings and misunderstandings of many inscriptions.

The catalogue is accompanied by a detailed index of names, titles and offices, inscriptions in verse and iconographic types.

Const. M. Constantopoulos



Z'.

MONOGRAM ON THE OBVERSE SIDE - INSCRIPTION ON THE REVERSE

33. — 22 mm.— Cruciform monogram; reading: *Θεοτόκε βοήθει*. Wreath border.

<i>Rev.</i>	+ ΙΩΑ	+ Ἰωά-
	NNϞ A	ννου ᾱ-
	ΠΟ VΠA	πὸ ὑπά-
	ΤΩ N	των

Wreath border.

Extra fine condition, 7th or 8th ce. *Plate III, 5.*

34. — 26 mm.— Id. Star in each quadrant. Worn out wreath border.

<i>Rev.</i>	+	+
	ΙΩΑΝ	Ἰωάν-
	NH CΠA	νη σπα-
	ΘΑΡΙ	θαρί-
	Ω	-ω

Wreath border.

Fine condition, 7th or 8th ce.

35. — 24 mm. — Semi-erased monogram; wreath border.

<i>Rev.</i>	ΓΕΩΡ	Γεωρ-
	ΠΙ	γί[ω δού]-
	.. X. . .	[λω] X[ρις]-
	. OV	[τ]οῦ (?)

Fair condition, 7th or 8th ce.

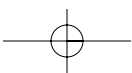
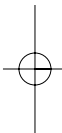
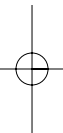
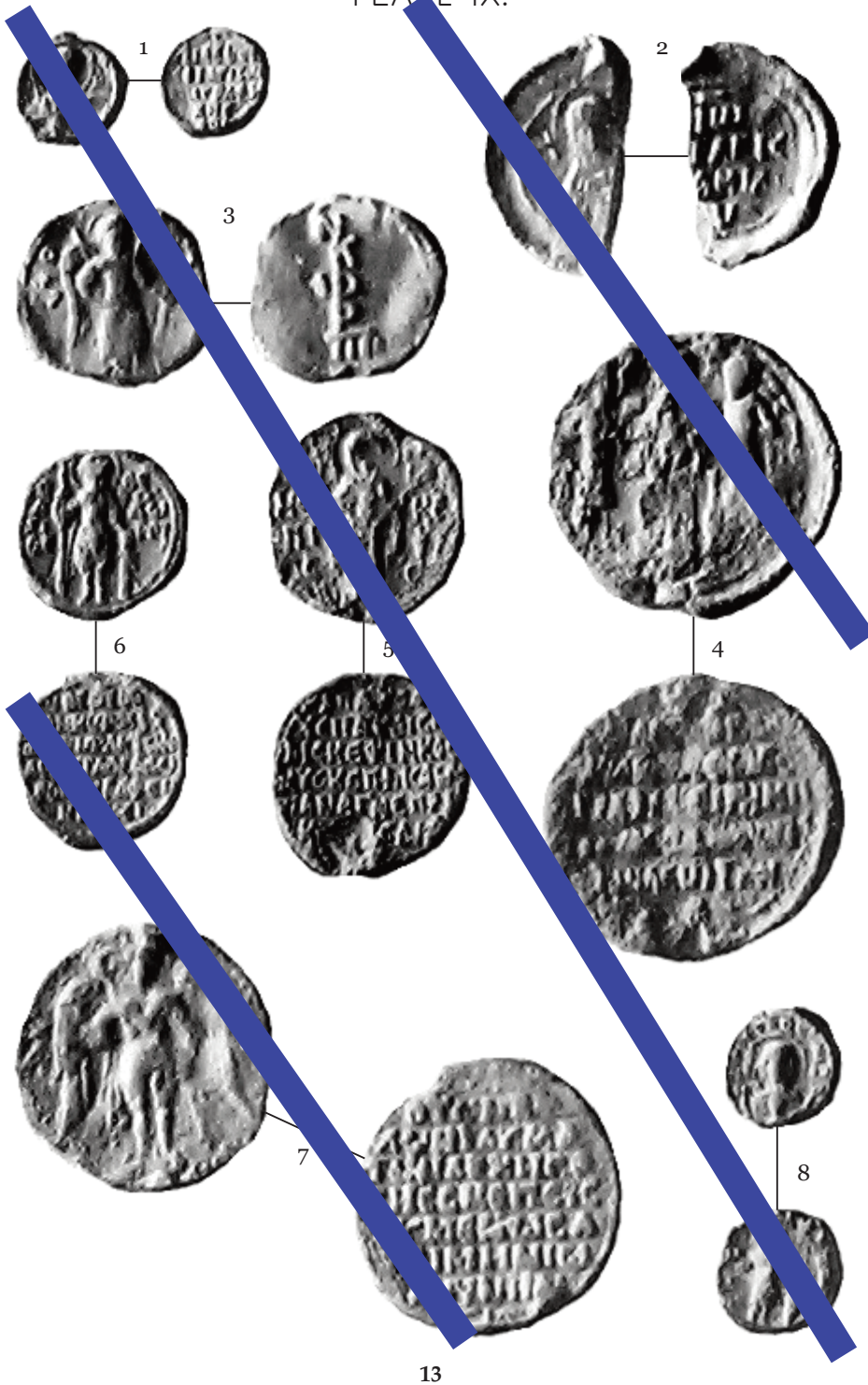
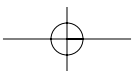
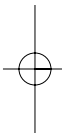
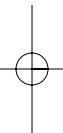


PLATE IX.





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(Numbers of seals)

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